

**Statement by J. Scott Carpenter
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**House International Relations Committee
Subcommittee on the Middle East and Central Asia
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I am honored to be here today to discuss the critical nature of our engagement in the “the struggle of ideas” in the broader Middle East and North Africa, and how we are working together to actively support reformers throughout the region.

Not even a full two years ago, in November 2003 at the National Endowment for Democracy, President Bush outlined a new policy, a forward strategy for freedom in the Middle East. He said that “sixty years of Western nations excusing and accommodating the lack of freedom in the Middle East did nothing to make us safe -- because in the long run, stability cannot be purchased at the expense of liberty.” In his 2004 Inaugural Address, the President reiterated America’s support for the people of the Middle East and North Africa in their fight for freedom. “We will persistently clarify the choice before every ruler in every nation: The moral choice between oppression, which is always wrong, and freedom, which is eternally right.”

In the time since the President made his comments, there has been tremendous momentum in the region. Momentum not witnessed in this region in nearly 50 years. A new word – “change” – has crept into the public discourse throughout the region, and there is a new generation of activists willing to bravely work to bring about a democratic transformation in their home countries. The stories are breathtaking. People standing in line to vote in free, fair, and competitive elections in Afghanistan, the Palestinian territories, and Iraq. The people of Lebanon gathering in Martyr’ Square to demand democracy, and now preparing to cast their ballots in upcoming elections. For the first time in decades, the people of Egypt are preparing to participate in competitive elections. A revolution in attitudes and expectations is slowly taking place, and civil society organizations are mobilizing to play a role in the burgeoning reform movement. The region is responding to the tide of freedom.

We are doing our part. Our work to support reformers includes both multilateral and bilateral efforts. At the Sea Island summit last year, we and our G-8 allies introduced a new multilateral initiative, the “Partnership for Progress and a Common Future” with the governments and peoples of the Broader Middle East and North Africa. We are working around a common agenda for reform and moving in the same direction. These political, economic, and education initiatives will make it possible for us to work together with our European allies and other partners in a coordinated effort to support those working for positive change in this region.

The engine for this G-8 initiative is the annual “Forum for the Future,” which brings together regional and G-8 Foreign, Economic, and other Ministers in an on-going dialogue on democracy, rule of law, human rights, open market economy, and education reforms. Business and civil society leaders participate in parallel dialogues. The next Forum will be held in November in Bahrain. The centerpiece of our discussion will be the political reform taking place in the region.

Even as we carry our multilateral partnership forward, the Middle East Partnership Initiative is a critical bilateral tool to expand the political space for civil society and others to operate. Announced by the Bush Administration in 2002, and funded with bipartisan support from the U.S. Congress, the Middle East Partnership Initiative has sought to bring the resources, experience, and determination of the United States to bear in an effort to bolster the reform movement in the Middle East. During the first three years of its existence, with the \$254 million appropriated by Congress, the Middle East Partnership Initiative set in motion more than 130 programs in 14 countries of the Middle East. Some of these programs are small and limited to one country, while others are large, ongoing efforts that involve several different countries. Together they represent a rising wave of people and organizations calling for change, and as well as interpreting the President’s Freedom Agenda in their own language and culture.

MEPI works with partners in the region to develop programs that help put in place the building blocks for democratic change. Our partners include non-governmental organizations, businesses, universities, international institutions, and in some limited cases, Middle Eastern governments themselves. However, MEPI was never meant to be

solely a programmatic initiative, but a critical policy tool driving reform and ensuring that policy reinforced the objectives of our programs. For example, just before he left Cairo, then U.S. Ambassador to Egypt David Welch, now Assistant Secretary of State for NEA, personally awarded MEPI small grants to a number of democracy-focused non-governmental organizations. His high-level public announcement of these grants made a powerful political statement about where we as the United States would like to see the direction of political reform in Egypt go, and complemented the work that the Egyptian organizations seek to undertake. This integration of policy and programs is something we are striving to support and replicate across all MEPI programs.

Let me also provide a snapshot of some of the work MEPI is undertaking in each of its four pillars, as reform must take place in all sectors if it is to be sustainable. In the political reform pillar, MEPI seeks to develop the democratic habits and institutions that are essential to active citizenries and accountable, representative government. Through MEPI, and in close coordination with USAID, the United States Government was able to quickly put in place a program in Lebanon to support the upcoming May elections. With our help, within weeks of the protests in Martyr's Square, a consortium of indigenous democracy organizations put up a website explaining how to participate in the movement and elections. We are also working with organizations undertake polling, and engaging with Lebanese journalists and others from the region on how to cover elections.

In the economic reform pillar, MEPI pursues a reform agenda that promotes economic growth through the development of the private sector and trade liberalization. A major piece of this economic pillar is funding and launching trade technical assistance in support of the Middle East Free Trade Area (MEFTA). MEPI, working with USTR and USAID, helps countries prepare for TIFAs, FTAs, and WTO accession. Our programs were instrumental in helping Morocco meet its FTA obligations and in helping Bahrain to close negotiations in less than 6 months.

In the educational reform pillar, MEPI seeks to improve access to – and the quality and relevance of – education for young people, particularly girls. Through “My Arabic Library” we are putting

translated children's books into schools and training teachers how to use them in Jordan, Lebanon, and Bahrain.

In the women's empowerment pillar, MEPI's goal is to help remove the barriers – legal, regulatory, political, and cultural – to the full participation of women in Middle Eastern society. Just next week in Tunis, over 200 women business leaders from across the Middle East are meeting to not only receive leadership training, but also to develop a global business network that will hopefully help to grow their own enterprises back at home. I am proud that over a dozen senior American business women will be joining us for this program.

We also work closely with USAID on its bilateral programming. USAID began implementing democracy and governance programs in the 1990s in Egypt, the Palestinian Territories, and Lebanon. As part of the President's commitment and support for political reform in the Middle East, USAID bilateral programming has expanded to include Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, Jordan, and Yemen.

The United States understands that the evolution of true democracy is necessarily a home-grown, "generational" phenomenon. But the U.S. government, through both our multilateral and bilateral efforts, is doing its part to nurture, encourage, and assist this historic process of reform in the Middle East. We appreciate Congress's willingness to provide the resources necessary for the U.S. to do its part. We look forward to working with Congress to support reform throughout the Broader Middle East and North Africa.

Thank you.